

33.

From "THE PRACTITIONER" for July, 1896.

ON THE USE OF SALICYLATE OF SODIUM AND
BROMIDE OF POTASSIUM IN THE IRRITABLE
TEMPER OF CARDIAC DISEASE AND GOUT.

BY T. LAUDER BRUNTON, M.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.S.

ON THE USE OF SALICYLATE OF SODIUM AND BROMIDE OF POTASSIUM IN THE IRRITABLE TEMPER OF CARDIAC DISEASE AND GOUT.

BY T. LAUDER BRUNTON, M.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.S.

AN irritable temper is a great misfortune, not only to its possessor, but to his friends and acquaintances. It may be natural or acquired, permanent or temporary. In many people an irritable temper is hereditary, but it may be brought very much under control by constant effort; while in others, a temper which was not originally bad may become excessively irritable from lack of control, and the habit of yielding to it on slight provocation. But the temper may become irritable from various physical conditions, such as continued ill health; or it may become temporarily irritable, as in gouty people shortly before an attack of gout. Not infrequently the explosions of temper which occur on very slight provocation are really due to the irritation produced by an accumulation of small irritations, bodily or mental, which have been gradually working up the patient into a state of excitement, and this feeling vents itself in an explosion quite out of proportion to the irritation which has simply let it loose, but has not really produced it. Thus, an unfortunate clerk or office-boy may be roundly abused for some very slight slip on his part, while the wrath poured out by his principal is really due to business worries or personal annoyances altogether unconnected with the subordinate's fault.

Continuous physical discomfort likewise tends to cause an accumulation of irritability, which finally finds vent in an explosion of temper, and an angry person sometimes blames himself for a moral wrong when he is really suffering from physical disorder.

The late Dr. Milner Fothergill used to tell a story of a very irritable old lady who frequently retired to her own room to pray for grace to control her temper, when what she really needed, in Dr. Fothergill's opinion, was a dose of potash to relieve her gout.

In some gouty people twenty grains of bicarbonate of potash, with ten or twenty of bromide of potassium, taken when the feeling of irritability comes on, frequently soothes it, and it has the further effect of lessening the worry even in those who are not irritable. If this "temper powder," as I am accustomed to call it, be taken when some irritating recurrence takes place, or some depressing news is heard, it appears to take away the sting of either, so that, in place of being much worried and unable to turn his attention to other things, the person feels as if he had slept over the bad news, or the worry, and is able to obtain relief by turning his attention to something else.

Irritability of temper does not occur in all cases of cardiac disease, but it is by no means an infrequent symptom. The late Mr. Mark Morris, Steward of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, one of the acutest observers that I ever came across, told me that when a patient came down to the office at eleven o'clock at night, and insisted upon his immediate discharge from the hospital, he knew that it was a case of cardiac disorder.

Some time ago, a little girl, the daughter of a clergyman, began to show symptoms of unwonted irritability of temper. She was peevish, fretful, and quarrelled with her brothers and sisters. This was looked upon as sinful, and the child was reproved or punished accordingly, until one day a doctor, who was a friend of the family, happened to put his ear to her chest and discovered that she was suffering from severe mitral regurgitation, with dilated heart. In a paper published in *THE PRACTITIONER* in February, 1894, I mentioned that unwonted irritability of temper was sometimes the precursor of a headache, and in that paper I described the beneficial action of bromide of potassium and salicylate of soda in relieving headache. It occurred to me that in a case of heart disease, the irritability might be relieved by the use of these drugs, and I have lately been trying them with a

considerable amount of success. The subjective feelings of the patients were improved, and, while they had previously denied any improvement under the use of digitalis and other cardiac remedies, even although this had improved the objective condition, they acknowledged, after a few doses of bromide and salicylate, that they felt better. The mode of action of the bromide is readily enough understood, as it is a simple sedative to the nerve centres. The mode of action of salicylate is not so clear, although the admirable researches of Dr. Haig seem to point to its action indirectly by the removal of uric acid.

Lessened irritability of temper is useful not only to the patient but to his friends, and it is sometimes easier to treat patients by giving physic to their friends than by giving it to themselves, and frequently the other members of a family, friends, or of society have their appetites spoilt, their digestion impaired, and their pleasure in life destroyed by the irritability of one or two individuals, and anything that will lessen this irritability will do more to improve the health of the others than any amount of drugs can do of themselves.

